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ABSTRACT

An activity, developed to assist preservice teachers to clarify their understanding of teacher effectiveness and the role of a teacher training program, uses a list, given to each student, of words that may be used to describe an effective teacher: fair, honest, friendly, knowledgeable, organized, prepared, articulate, creative, well-groomed, intelligent, sympathetic, empathetic, authoritarian, business-like, professional, up-to-date, enthusiastic, interesting, affectionate, and dependable. Students arrange the characteristics in descending order from most to least important and then divide the characteristics into two groups. In one, characteristics that may result from teacher training are placed; in the other, those that result from normal maturation-socialization processes. A re-grouping based on the top five descriptors from each group follows, forming the final selection of characteristics considered most important. Students analyze their rankings of teacher characteristics in the light of how teachers acquire desirable qualifications and which are the result of teacher training. Further discussion may be held on the relationships between a characteristic description and a performance description of an effective teacher, and how teacher training may help develop skills and knowledge which cause such characteristics to be evident to students, parents, and other educators. (JD)

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Characteristics of Effective Teachers - A Clarifying Activity

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Characteristics of Effective Teachers - A Clarifying Activity

Prospective teachers are often involved in discussions concerning successful or effective teachers. Since they have had several years experience in observing teaching behaviors, they are usually quite explicit in expressing their opinions of what makes a good teacher and what makes a poor teacher. These views may be based upon some memorable personal involvement with a teacher or simply upon day to day observations. Some are even based upon stories heard from parents and peers with no direct personal involvement or observation.

What causes the prospective teacher to select certain characteristics as being important? While no exact list of influences is evident, there do appear to be some commonly cited factors which sound much like the reasons one might give for liking or disliking someone. Some of those often identified by future teachers fall into the following categories:

(1) personality differences
(2) intellectual differences
(3) sociological differences
(4) sex and race bias
(5) perceived competence
(6) self-image
(7) value differences
(8) trust

Some questions begin to arise as one further examines characteristics of effective teachers. How does a teacher acquire those qualifications? Are they a result of teacher training? If so, which ones? Are they a result of normal maturation and socialization processes? If so, why do we need teacher training? What are the relationships between a characteristic description and a performance description of an effective teacher? How can teacher training help a prospective teacher develop skills and knowledges which cause such characteristics to be evident to students, parents and other educators?

The following activity was developed in The Changing American School Program at the University of Arkansas to assist pre-service teachers to clarify their understanding of how one may describe an effective teacher and the roles of a teacher training program in developing effective teachers. It also serves as an introduction to insights of ever changing patterns of teacher evaluation and accountability.

PREPARATION

From the list of descriptors provided, make a set of one inch by two inch cards for each student. (Slips of paper are also acceptable.) Type one descriptor on each card. Place each set in an envelope for ease of distribution. After a brief discussion of what the class believes makes a good teacher, distribute the envelopes

of descriptors and the following directions. Instruct the class to work independently. One may wish to use the exercise as an out-of-class assignment in order to allow students adequate time to consider their decisions more carefully and to have more time to discuss the results without undue interruptions. The descriptors to be used are fair, honest, friendly, knowledgeable, organized, prepared, articulate, creative, well-groomed, intelligent, sympathetic, empathetic, authoritarian, business-like, professional, up-to-date, enthusiastic, interesting, affectionate, and dependable.

DIRECTIONS

The envelope which you have contains twenty cards. On each card is a word which can be used to describe an effective teacher. Take a few minutes to become familiar with the words and to think about what they may mean. When you feel comfortable with the words complete the following four steps in the order presented. Record each step on the form provided.

STEP ONE

Using the cards from the the envelope, arrange the characteristics from what you believe to be most important to least important. Record your arrangement.

1. 11.
2. 12.
3. 13.
4. 14.
5. 15.
6. 16.
7. 17.
8. 18.
9. 19.
10. 20.

STEP TWO

Divide the characteristics to form two groups. Place in Group I those characteristics which you feel may result from teacher training. Place in Group II those characteristics you feel result from normal maturation-socialization processes. Rank the words in each group from most important to least important. It is not necessary to have ten words in each group. Record the results.

Group I	Group II
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.

8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

STEP THREE

Now, take the top five from Group I and Group II and form a new grouping. Rank them from most important to least important. Repeat the process using the bottom five from each group. Record the results.

Top Group	Bottom Group
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
4.	4.
5.	5.
6.	6.
7.	7.
8.	8.
9.	9.
10.	10.

STEP FOUR

Compare the final rankings with your initial rankings in Step One. What differences in rankings have occurred? How do you feel about the final rankings? Why? How do you explain any differences? Which do you think teacher training can help you the most in developing?

CONCLUSION

A concensus of characteristics should not be expected or, for that matter, even encouraged. Prospective teachers should, however, be expected to examine their decisions carefully. As a concluding exercise, have the class translate their characteristics into observable teacher behaviors and add any additional descriptors and behaviors which they feel are important. The following questions will be helpful for more in-depth understanding:

(1) For which behaviors may schools hold teachers most accountable?

(2) How may schools determine accountability for the behaviors identified?

(3) Should teachers be held formally accountable for these behaviors? Why or why not?

(4) How can teachers monitor their own progress?

(5) How can colleagues and students help a teacher develop desired behaviors?

The class will certainly suggest additional related areas of discussion and investigation. It is hoped that this exercise will assist prospective teachers to better understand themselves and the positions of others and encourage more careful analysis of their own teaching.